



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Southeast Region

SOUTHEASTERN CURRENTS

FEBRUARY 2007 NEWSLETTER

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Northern Pintail and Tundra Swan
on a Mattamuskeet Impoundment.
FWS Photo.

Waterfowl population at historic levels at Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge

"I have never seen such 'swarms' of ducks and I grew up back in the dark ages when there were a lot of ducks," observed Dennis Stewart, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, shortly after he had completed the mid-winter aerial waterfowl survey for Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge.

The annual survey revealed a total of 267,679 waterfowl on the 50,000 acre refuge. The most prevalent waterfowl species were green-winged teal (96,627), northern pintail (45,773), ring-necked duck (30,425), and tundra swan (28,000).

The true significance of the tremendous waterfowl numbers did not become apparent until John Stanton, Service Migratory Bird biologist, reviewed aerial waterfowl survey statistics. His review found that the current population peaks for many species, including green-winged teal and pintail, were two to three times higher than the highest peak populations since 1986, when the data set was initiated.

Numbers for northern pintail, a species in decline since the 1970's, were especially notable. In fact, the last time the entire state of North Carolina had more than 45,000 pintail during the mid-winter survey was 1978. Mattamuskeet has wintered over 50 percent of the pintail in the Atlantic Flyway for the last 30 years. This year, however, the percentage is likely well over 70 percent.

It is likely that there were many factors in play which converged to create the "Perfect Storm" of waterfowl numbers on the refuge. Some of the most obvious factors were a dry spring-summer which produced an abundance of moist soil plants followed by a wet fall-winter which refilled wetlands. These conditions prevailed throughout most of northeastern North Carolina. Then, once the hunting season started, hunting pressure pushed many birds attracted to the region to sanctuaries including refuges.

Another factor at Mattamuskeet, in addition to excellent natural habitat conditions, was \$1,000,000 in newly renovated impoundments offering an additional 1,600 acres of excellent moist soil habitat which in previous years produced only low levels of food. In fact, one 416 acre impoundment which had not been drawn down in over 10 years, produced a dense bed of wild millet which at one point in December harbored 18,181 birds!

Ducks Unlimited played a critical role in the renovation of the impoundments. Craig LeSchack and Billy Webster with the Ducks Unlimited South Atlantic Field office in Charleston, South Carolina provided a donation of \$173,000 in project funds, as well as significant engineering and contracting assistance. More renovation work and increased management activities are planned for 2007, ensuring a bright future for waterfowl at Mattamuskeet, though it seems unlikely that the unprecedented waterfowl numbers of 06-07 will be seen again for quite some time – but then again..... More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Bruce Freske, Mattamuskeet NWR, Swan Quarter, NC

Coal slurry release threatens listed species

Lumps of coal in a Christmas stocking are usually considered to be a bad thing. Daphne Field Office Biologists Eric Spadgenske and Ted Martin found something much worse this past December - - thousands of tons of coal slurry in a small stream in central Alabama's Bibb County.

Biologists were alerted to the situation by Dr. Randy Haddock, Cahaba River Society. Discharge from a mining operation resulted in an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 tons of coal in the small stream. Water from the stream eventually ends up in the Cahaba River just upstream from the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge. That section of river is home to at least six listed species of fish, snails, and mussels, as well as being designated critical habitat.



Coal slurry contaminates a small stream in Alabama's Bibb County. The stream flows into Piney Woods Creek, a tributary of the Cahaba River. FWS Photo.



Discharged coal slurry material covers this wetland in central Alabama. FWS Photo.

A Service dive team will conduct a quantitative assessment to determine impacts to Cahaba listed species. The Daphne Ecological Services Field Office is working closely with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, the Alabama Surface Mining Commission, and the mining company to address the problem. In addition, the Daphne office has obtained a voluntary pledge from Molpus Timberland not to cut timber in the 474 acres surrounding the coal-contaminated watershed.

Submitted by Mike Groutt, Ecological Services Field Office, Daphne, AL

Behind the Scenes--



Mona Crawford of the hatchery's float entry in Welaka's Christmas Parade. FWS Photo.

Best fishes during the holidays

"Anything to promote our cause, I'm for it." Mona Crawford means it. She has dedicated her life to fisheries conservation through her work at Welaka National Fish Hatchery in Florida, and through her participation and love for the sport of bass fishing.

Recently, she was challenged with the task of creating an educational and entertaining float for the town's Christmas Parade. With help from enthusiastic family members, Mona pulled together some of the cutest native fishes in the area and created a warm and wonderful way to wish Welaka a happy holiday season.

"During and since the parade we have had so many compliments that it made it worth all the effort we put into it," Mona said.

Submitted by Judy Toppins, Fisheries, Atlanta, Georgia

Bragging Rights --



Picture of billboard in first location.
Photo by Marion Sansing.

Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge becomes “True Mississippi.”

The Friends of Noxubee Refuge may be the first to have a billboard installed to advertise their refuge. Lamar Advertising offered free advertising space on their currently vacant billboards in our surrounding counties. The Friends paid to have a 48'x14' vinyl poster printed, and Lamar is hanging it free of charge in locations surrounding the refuge. Friends used James Bryant's beautiful photo of Bluff Lake, a winner from the 2005 Annual Amateur Nature Photography Contest, as a background. In December, the billboard was first installed on Louisville Road in Starkville across from Starkville High School. If you would like to get a better view of the photograph, it is available on the FONR website (click on the link for "2005 FONR photo contest winners"); Now you can see it on Highway 69 in Columbus.

Submitted by Andrea Dunstan, Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, Brooksville, Mississippi

Savannah National Wildlife Refuge featured on Southern Outdoors

Savannah National Wildlife Refuge was featured on the television program Southern Outdoor on Sunday, January 14. The weekly program airs on Fox Sports South and is hosted by noted Georgia outdoorsman O'Neill Williams. Biologist Russ Webb and Ranger Amy Ochoa were both interviewed for the piece which was taped at the refuge on December 12, 2006. The program focused upon the refuge's managed freshwater impoundment system and wildlife-dependent public use activities. If anyone is interested in viewing the program, a DVD is available on loan from the Savannah Coastal Refuges headquarters office.



Amy Ochoa is interviewed by
O'Neill Williams. Photo by Russ
Webb.

Submitted by Amy Ochoa, Savannah National Wildlife Refuge, Georgia



Improved blind number 1. Photo by
Andrea Dunstan

Hunting improvements pay off

Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge offers wheelchair-bound hunters an opportunity to hunt in designated hunting blinds. These blinds are being improved every year as a result of hunter suggestions. This year the Huntmaster, “Bud Lift” portable elevating blind was moved to a new location, and blind number 1 was improved by an Eagle Scout project which enclosed the blind for a more sheltered hunt. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Andrea Dunstan, Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, Brooksville, Mississippi

Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge hosts youth deer hunt

Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge held its first youth deer hunt December 16, 2006. Fourteen youngsters were drawn for this lottery hunt and hunted from ground blinds made by refuge staff. No one got a deer during the morning hunt, but there were stories of "the big one that got away." Later that afternoon, two of the youths were successful in harvesting a deer. Providing this type of hunt sparks young peoples' interest in wildlife management, the great outdoors, and keeps up the strong family tradition of hunting in Arkansas.

Submitted by Carla Mitchell, Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge, Dardanelle, Arkansas



Hunter Hoover and his dad with Hunter's first deer. Photo by Ben Mense.



Members of Friends of Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge erect new kiosk. FWS Photo.

Friends of Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge and South Carolina Wildlife Federation host joint workday

The Friends of Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge and the South Carolina Wildlife Federation teamed up for the annual Working for Wildlife workday on December 2, 2006. Two Boy Scout troops, one from Irmo, South Carolina and one from Florence, South Carolina, and several South Carolina Wildlife Federation and Refuge Friends Group members assisted staff with projects on the refuge. During the course of the day, the group built 30 bluebird boxes, cleared a refuge trail of pinecones and debris, completed a new kiosk along the Wildlife Drive, and raked several red-cockaded woodpecker cavity trees in preparation for prescribed burning. The highlight of the day for the Boy Scouts was meeting members of another pack and working together on the projects. The adults, representing Hartsville, Society Hill, and points in between, enjoyed getting to know one another and planning for future collaborations. The refuge was the ultimate beneficiary with so many needed projects completed in one day!

Submitted by Laura Housh, Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge, McBee, South Carolina

Fire management displays available from Regional Fire Management Office

In Fiscal Year 2006 the Regional Fire Management Office set aside funds to produce educational materials. A display committee was formed to produce mobile units that could be taken to festivals, libraries, and school groups. The display committee consisted of Boyd Blihovde, Kelley Van Druten, Terri Jenkins, Tony Wilder, Jeff Twiss, Keith Penrose, and Garry Tucker. The committee worked together to produce six tabletop and six large (self standing) displays. The displays were recently shipped to select refuges where there is a specific need (Merritt Island,



Tools of the trade display. FWS Photo.

Savannah Coastal Refuges, Florida Panther, Mississippi Sandhill Crane, and Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuges. Although these displays are housed at specific refuges, they can be shipped to anyone in the Region that needs them. Photos of The Wildland Urban Interface and the Tools of the Trade displays are attached. Not shown are the Fire Management in the Southeast, Fire Management in the Carolinas, Fire Management in the Gulf Coast, and Fire Management (Spanish version). Anyone who is interested in borrowing any of these displays may contact Boyd Blihovde at 321-403-4913.



Urban Interface display. FWS Photo.

Submitted by Boyd Blihovde, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Titusville, Florida

Hats Off --



Marion Sansing, Volunteer of the Year. Photo by Henry Sansing.

National Wildlife Refuge Association's "Volunteer of the Year" awarded to Noxubee Friend

Friends of Noxubee Refuge Volunteer Marion Sansing is this year's deserving recipient of the National Wildlife Refuge Association's "Volunteer of the Year" award. She began volunteering at Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge only three years ago and has accrued over 3,000 volunteer hours. She is deeply involved in planning family-oriented programs and projects to beautify the refuge. Marion has a rare creative ability she expresses through publications, brochures, flyers and signs for the Friends group, as well as art to sell in the Nature Store. She helped develop and manages a membership database and has helped increase the Friends Group membership by her efforts while serving on the membership committee. It was through her efforts that a banner was developed and a partnership established with a local agency to display the banner on vacant billboards for free. Noxubee Refuge and the Friends Group have received more recognition due to her efforts.

Submitted by Andrea Dunstan, Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, Brooksville, Mississippi

Photo Album --

Hunting improvements pay off -- more photos



Local quadriplegic hunter, Chris Beasley, says it will be hard to improve on this! Photo by Gwen Cotton.

Waterfowl population at historic levels at Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge -- more photos



Waterfowl "Slick" on Lake Mattamuskeet. FWS Photo.



Northern Pintail feeding in a Mattamuskeet impoundment. Photo by Joe Albee.

Visitor Services --



North Carolina refuges encourage training for birder-friendly businesses and communities

With over 100 coastal plain sites approved for the new North Carolina Birding Trail, birders will be traveling in all corners of the coastal plain. Among the highlights of the trail are the national wildlife refuges of eastern North Carolina. Due to marketing associated with the North Carolina Birding Trail, refuges will likely receive even more visits from birders than ever before. Local businesses and community members are invited to take advantage of the training program offered by the North Carolina Birding Trail.

"One of the most obvious attractions for visitors to eastern North Carolina is the abundance of undeveloped land - our wild places, said Mike Bryant, Refuge Manager for Alligator River and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuges.

"Businesses that can tap into the wildlife-oriented visitors will have a huge clientele, the majority of whom are well-educated and affluent. Statistics show that these visitors spend a great deal of money and show a lot of appreciation and respect for the environment in the places they visit. That makes them ideal guests, Bryant said.

The North Carolina Birding trail will offer a Birder Friendly Business and Birder Friendly Community training program at Brunswick Community College on February 8, 2007. Designed for businesses and communities near the birding trail, this training will provide tools and information to market your business and community to birders as they travel the Birding Trail. This program will provide information on special needs for this niche market, as well as specific suggestions and ways to reach this market. Training topics include birders as clients, enhancing your business and community for birders, hospitality and etiquette, birding basics, and conservation practices.



This training session is targeted for southeastern North Carolina but others will be welcome based on space availability (limited to 25 participants). The cost is \$20 for the day-long session. If you are unable to attend this training but are interested in organizing a future training session for your area, please contact the North Carolina Birding Trail at info@ncbirdingtrail.org or call Stacy Tomas (Birder Friendly Programs Coordinator) at 919-513-7407 or Salinda Daley (NC Birding Trail Coordinator) at 919-604-5183.

Registration forms and fliers can be obtained locally at the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Office in Manteo or by emailing Bonnie Strawser (bonnie_strawser@fws.gov)

Wage Grade Profile --

Chris Murphy enjoys the array of rewarding duties at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery



Chris Murphy. Photos by Amanda Patrick.

"It can be busy and hectic some days, but it's also very rewarding," says Maintenance Worker Chris Murphy. A service employee at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Chris greatly enjoys working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as it gives him a sense of pride and accomplishment.

"You never have the same day twice," says Chris. "I really enjoy being involved in all the aspects of the hatchery operation, from loading trucks to entering data into the computer. Even on the busiest, most challenging of days, I feel proud of the work that I do as I feel as though I am accomplishing something."

A native of McCreary County, Kentucky, Chris has worked at Wolf Creek for his entire 11-year career and is proud to be a part of the hatchery team and the Service. When not at work, Chris enjoys hunting and fishing. Spending time with family is also a priority, including his wife Billie Jo, daughter Taylor (age 13) and stepson Bryson (age 6).

Submitted by Amanda Patrick, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Jamestown, Kentucky



Chris Murphy at work. Photos by Amanda Patrick.



Chris Murphy at work. Photos by Amanda Patrick.